Let's Ban Smoking at the Shore!

Contrary to common practice, all that sand is *not* a giant ashtray.

By Jen A. Miller 7/11/2013

On a recent Sunday at the PATCO station at 9th-10th and Locust, five people were waiting for a train to New Jersey. At the same exact moment, four of us turned our heads in the same direction. One passenger had lit a cigarette in a place where smoking is not allowed.

Soon, hopefully, this will be the same reaction to anyone who lights up on the beaches of the Jersey Shore, where cigarette butts make up the number one type of debris

A new proposed bill would ban smoking in all New Jersey state parks, beaches and wildlife management areas, making one blanket policy for everyone to follow. It's about time for New Jersey, which in 2006 became the 11th state to ban indoor smoking.

Right now, we have a patchwork of laws and ordinances when it comes to the shore. A few examples: In Seaside Park, smoking is banned on all beaches and boardwalks. Long Branch and Sunset Beach in Cape May County are also smoke free. Smoking is banned on the boardwalk in Belmar, and on sections of its beaches. Harvey Cedars and Ship Bottom have banned beach smoking while lifeguards are on duty. Ocean City has designated smoking areas on its boardwalk. Cape May tried to pass an beach smoking ban in 2012, but the proposal was shot down by the argument that it would hurt tourism.

I don't buy that. Belmar saw a 17.6% jump in beach tag sale the year after it restricted smoking on its beaches. I heard similar shrill scare tactics in advance of New Jersey's 2006 indoor smoking ban, and that didn't quite pan out. The big exemption is casinos, but that's a mountain too big to climb right now, given that the state continues to throw good money after bad in Atlantic City, and too many politicans think that allowing one addiction to feed into another is going to inject new life into our flailing gambling halls. (I hope Revel enjoys the new cleaning bills on all that gorgeous white, textured wall art that's going to turn yellow now that they allow smoking.)

Banning smoking on our beaches and in our parks, however, is a no-brainer, especially given that 85% of adults don't smoke.

There's no upshot to smoking. None. Not for smokers (the risks here are obvious), non-smokers (second hand smoke is a carcinogen), or for the beaches onto which the butts are thrown, where kids digging in the sand can pick them up and stick them in their mouths. Now that smoking is banned from bars, restaurants and malls (yes, I remember when shoppers could smoke in the Deptford Mall), the smell is more pungent where it does still live. I sure can smell a cigarette lit on the beach. We're more sensitive to that smell now that it's banned in so many places, which is why all four of us simultaneously whipped our heads toward the offender in that PATCO station that Sunday morning.

Smokers already schlep outside in all sorts of weather if they want to smoke while at a bar. They'll do the same to a designated area if we ban smoking on beaches. If they want to destroy their lungs, they, of course, can go right ahead and do it together in a defined space. They don't need to hurt me and New Jersey's biggest tourism asset at the same time.

http://blogs.phillymag.com/the_philly_post/2013/07/11/ban-smoking-new-jersey-shore/